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# Our Harassed Diplomats: Too Much Kibitzing

## Expert Outlines Problems and Possible Cure

Ellis O. Briggs, author of the new book, "Farewell to Foggy Bottom," retired recently after 40 years in the United States diplomatic service during which he served as ambassador to eight countries on three continents. In this article written for the Associated Press, he tells of problems of diplomats and offers suggestions for improving the diplomatic service.

### BY ELLIS O. BRIGGS

The ambassador, as the chief representative of his government abroad, has become the harassed American, struggling with the twin hazards of Washington planning and absentee management, and with almost as many kibitzers and crusaders underfoot as there are at an evangelist rally.

Thus the American embassy in London gives shelter to 44 separate agencies of the federal government. They wave megaphones like coxswains at a Henley regatta, and they have 44 pipe lines carrying their clarion back to Washington.

Thus the American embassy in Moscow houses three score propagandists, handout specialists, peace corps volunteers, Pentagon attaches, and CIA agents, all ostensibly helping the ambassador wreak good on the bewildered Somali tribesmen.

### Athens an Example

Thus the American embassy in Athens is host to a unit of the United States coast guard, protecting our merchant marine from bay ratry on the Acropolis, and to a dozen representatives of the Agency for International Development, including a director and a program officer, for a program that ended three years ago.

A penetrating look at these mysteries has recently been taken by a subcommittee of the Senate committee on government operations. Its 16-page study is entitled "The American Ambassador." During nearly two years of nonpartisan investigation, this small and efficient subcommittee, headed by Sen. Henry M. Jackson (D., Wash.) took testimony from the secretary of state and his ranking assistants, and from 10 American ambassadors.

### Relief up to President

The subcommittee concludes that no profession in the world is as much a prey to deep thinkers, backseat drivers, and do-gooders as that of diplomacy, and that if American chiefs of mission are to survive the ministrations of these amateurs and volunteers, they must have authority commensurate with the responsibilities they are expected to discharge. The solution is impossible of realization unless the President himself is prepared to take action. Recent Presidents have been stronger on rhetoric and executive orders than they have in supporting their envoys.

The modern ambassador, in the words of the subcommittee report, is expected to perform his functions "with less independence and less policy authority than ambassadors once exercised, and with far more people underfoot. . . . And he is expected to serve as leader and coordinator of his country team, while lacking power or even much influence over the budgets, the personnel systems, the reporting requirements, and the operating policies of many of the field staffs theoretically subordinate to him."

### Agencies Still Powerful

This goes to the heart of the problem. Altho Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy both sought to fortify the ambassador by declaring his preeminence over all the other official Americans in a given coun-

try, their orders did little to make the authority of the ambassador effective. The 44 Washington agencies are still permitted to dispute with the state department the right of the latter to have the final word on the conduct of foreign affairs, and the representatives aboard of those agencies, while subordinate to the ambassador in matters of protocol and on ceremonial occasions, still have wide latitude in their activities and operations.

### Urge Wider Authority

The ambassadorial authority should extend to funds and personnel, including the budgets of other agencies and the assignment of the key officials from those agencies who are to serve in the ambassador's establishment.

No ambassador in his right mind would seek, for example, to control the mechanics of the CIA activities in his country. The ambassador should, however, be fully aware of the objectives of those operations, and apprised of the value of the assets it is proposed to risk to attain them.

### Should Have Veto Right

And if the hazard seems in the ambassador's judgment to outweigh the possible gain, he should be in a position to veto the operation. Otherwise the executive-coordinating role of the ambassador is meaningless.

Again, the ambassador should have the authority not only to remove individual members of his mission whose performance he considers ineffective, but he should possess in addition the far more important power to trim excess field staffs, and to abolish or consolidate overlapping jobs.

Some impressive don'ts are listed. The subcommittee would place a long overdue curb on special Washington emissaries zooming hither and thither, hectoring an ambassador at

his post and trying to paddle his canoe for him. Those visitors often succeed only in rocking the boat, or in punching a hole in the bottom.

Instead, the subcommittee recommends that ambassadors should return to Washington more frequently — two or three times a year at least — to immerse themselves in the stream of policy making and to make sure that each embassy abroad is in step with the procession at home.

A "clamp-down on the open mouth policy" is likewise advocated, so that it is the ambassador who is spokesman for the American government in a given country "and not a troupe of visiting firemen."

### Needs Support at Home

The ambassador also needs more effective support in the department of state—what the report calls "a strong rear echelon at headquarters"—so that when an important issue is raised by an envoy, fast action can be taken on it in Washington, and a suitable reply cabled back to the ambassador before the matter has died on the bureaucratic vine, or withered on the dessicated stalk of a missed opportunity.

This could be accomplished by increasing the stature of the country desk officer, thus providing each ambassador with a more stalwart working counterpart in the department of state. Maybe so, but to expand the existing departmental rabbit warren to accommodate 100 additional souped-up bunnies, each serving as the opposite number of an ambassador abroad, and each lustily thumping the foggy bottom terrain, might contribute still further to the personnel "layering" that Secretary of State Dean Rusk cited in his testimony, without significantly improving an ambassador's liaison with Washington.